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SUBJECT: CONFUSION REIGNS ON SURINAME'S NATIONAL DAY PARADE

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: U.S. participation in Suriname's National Day parade was cancelled at the last minute, reportedly on orders from President Venetiaan. Post sees no snub intended, but rather a lack of coordination and clearance within the GOS as the primary reason. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Despite months of planning and working-level coordination by the Embassy's Military Liaison Office and Surinamese military and Ministry of Defense officials, the participation of a South Dakota National Guard color guard in the November 25 National Day parade was unceremoniously cancelled, reportedly by President Venetiaan himself, just three days before the parade. (NOTE: Suriname and South Dakota are paired under the State Partnership Program.)

¶3. (U) Since then, the GOS and Surinamese military officials have engaged in fervent finger-pointing over this embarrassment, sniping at each other in media articles attributed to anonymous sources. The Embassy has remained above the fray and moved on, commenting only that bilateral relations remain strong. At the same time, we quietly downgraded the USG presence at National Day by canceling the visit of most members of the South Dakota team (and the training workshops they would have conducted) and postponed the courtesy visit of the DATT (resident in Brasilia) and three other 06 equivalent military officers.

¶4. (SBU) In calls to the MFA Permanent Secretary Frederick Boekstaaf and Minister of Defense Ivan Fernald, the Ambassador reflected a "more in sadness than in anger" approach, but took advantage of the opportunity to ding Ambassador Boekstaaf on Suriname's erratic voting patterns at the UNGA. She told Minister Fernald that it seemed the U.S. was being singled out, since the Dutch, French and Venezuelan military were slated to march. She also reminded Fernald about the link to the State Partnership Program and questioned whether this decision reflected a lack of commitment to the Partnership.

¶5. (U) The Minister assured her that no slight was intended. He said the President had not been notified of the proposed U.S. participation until the week of the parade. He blamed a specific military advisor on his staff for failing to keep him informed. According to Fernald (and as echoed in media accounts of the brouhaha), the President's criteria for marching in the parade were: participation in last year's parade; and a minimum participation level of at least one platoon. These criteria, which were news to us, made the U.S. ineligible.

¶6. (U) On National Day only the French and Dutch marched. The Venezuelans never showed up (despite erroneous local media reports to the contrary). According to our understanding of original plans, a Surinamese military flag detachment was supposed to carry the flags of participating nations. In the end, no foreign flags were carried.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: This is just one more example of the GOS's

decision-making process, which is characterized by a lack of internal coordination, overzealousness by interested parties that fail to check all the appropriate boxes (in this case military officials seeking to demonstrate their support for U.S.-Suriname military relations), and in which ultimately even the smallest of issues is decided by the Council of Ministers or by the President himself. Our view of the situation is that the President, mindful of Suriname's colonial past, did not want to see ANY/ANY foreign flags flying in his country's National Day parade. END COMMENT.

Schreiber Hughes